

Embracing technological innovations to stay ahead

Seiko Architectural Wall Systems wins Enterprise 50 10-Year Award, steps up transformation efforts to stay relevant in an increasingly digital world. **BY LIM HWEI ZHIAN, TANG HUI XIN MELISSA AND WANG SIRU**

DOTTED across Singapore are building facades constructed by Seiko Architectural Wall Systems Pte Ltd (Seiko Wall), whose works are also found in other First World cities across the globe.

Its strong track record has seen Seiko Wall winning the prestigious Enterprise 50 (E50) for 10 consecutive years since 2010.

As a company that has been creating high-performance building facades since 1978, Seiko Wall not only incorporates the latest skylights, curtain walls and window walls into its projects to make them aesthetically appealing, it also adopts thermal-break systems that fuse form with function.

In recent years, Seiko Wall has expanded beyond Singapore, taking on large-scale projects in cities such as Vancouver and Seattle.

In Singapore, some of the iconic facades that bear Seiko's imprint include the Centre for Healthcare Innovation at Jalan Tan Tock Seng and Carlton Hotel at 76 Bras Basah Road.

Seiko Wall's success is attributed to its constant pursuit of excellence, leadership development, talent management and adoption of new technologies.

Leadership philosophy

The success of a business is closely predicated on good leadership, and Seiko Wall's managing director, Rodney Cheong – who commits himself to a six-and-a-half-day work week – is always looking for ways to improve his and his colleagues' capabilities.

He summed up his philosophy: "It does not mean that you will succeed with hard work and dedication, but without these two elements, you will most likely fail."

"Hard work and dedication are what I call hygiene factors, meaning they are non-negotiable. You may be the smartest person in any room that you walk into but even then, you still have to work hard and stay committed if you want to make it to the top."

Mr Cheong places great value on his colleagues and encourages open discussion from them.

He said: "I treat my employees as partners rather than subordinates because I don't know everything and very often, my colleagues bring great ideas to the table that will make you think, 'Wow, why didn't I think of that?'"

He added: "Everybody has a talent. My job is to use Seiko Wall as a platform that allows everyone's talent to be fully realised."

Widening the talent pool

To enhance the company's technological innovation, it is seeking young talent – who are digital natives – to bring in fresh ideas.

In September 2019, the company gave a presentation to 180 engineering students in Nanyang Technological University to introduce them to career prospects in the building facade industry.

Its unique employee value proposition includes giving its people the opportunity to work on foreign projects for exposure. Employees will also get to work in a futuristic environment where humans, artificial intelligence (AI) and robots work side by side. Self-motivated and conscientious employees will be groomed for leadership roles as part of succession planning to secure the company's future.

Employees are also rewarded variable bonuses when Seiko Wall is profitable, as it believes that every staff member is part of the profit equation.

These initiatives reinforce to employees that they are valuable assets of the company.

Reshaping the building facade industry with new technologies

Despite the costs and potential disruption to operations, Seiko Wall has been investing in research and development (R&D) to ensure operational excellence.

It has collaborated with Singapore's Agency for Science, Technology and Research to incorporate the latest technology into building facades.

Seiko Wall is aware that the longer it delays deploying advanced technology, the harder it will be to stay competitive. Every 10 years or so, what was once cutting edge becomes history, so the process of renewal has to be continuous.

Seiko Wall's efforts have paid off – it now boasts a strong R&D department with innovative technology transformation.

As part of its latest transformation effort, Seiko Wall has turned to robotics and AI to supercharge its production processes.

The first step was to fully automate standardised high-volume/low-mix manufacturing processes that have a fixed production line or manufacturing method that does not deviate much.

As a result of automation, production speed has increased while labour cost and defects from human error were reduced.

Seiko Wall complemented the automation of its factory with new software and hardware solutions for its office to further remove bottlenecks in its entire value chain.

For instance, the company installed a human resource management (HRM) system that did away the tedious process of time cards for staff.

The complicated payroll functions were also streamlined to increase efficiency.



Seiko Wall receives the prestigious Enterprise 50 10-Year Award under the leadership of its managing director, Mr Rodney Cheong (middle). Its success is attributed to its constant pursuit of excellence, leadership development, talent management and adoption of new technologies. PHOTO: SEIKO WALL

It is also taking steps to fully digitalise its remaining departments. In 2018, Seiko Wall introduced a QR code material traceability system that automates the laborious process of material tracking.

The QR code improves inventory visibility, accuracy, traceability and accountability.

It enables both clients and Seiko Wall to have real-time monitoring of the completion status of raw materials using 3D building information modelling (BIM), and has been well received by both international and local clients.

Said Mr Cheong: "The technological innovations that we adopted not only help us to achieve operational excellence, but they also help Seiko Wall to differentiate itself in a market that is very crowded."

"As buildings get more advanced, the engineering demands placed on building facades will rise rapidly. The only way to meet these demands from customers in First World cities is relentless innovation to stay relevant, competitive, and viable. This is not a good-to-have, it is an item that we must have in our toolkit."

The company will continue its pursuit of technological innovations as a key differentiating factor from its competitors.

By early 2022, it aims to implement robotics technology in facade manufacturing and glazing.



Artist's impression of Seiko Wall's commercial project in Vancouver. The building, named 400 West Georgia, has a modern three-dimensional "stacked boxes" design, unique for its eco-friendly exterior. PHOTO: SEIKO WALL



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This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the E50 partners and the NUS Business School. Seiko Architectural Wall Systems Pte Ltd was among the winners in 2019. The annual E50 ranking is co-organised by The Business Times and KPMG, sponsored by OCBC Bank, and supported by Enterprise Singapore, Singapore Exchange and Singapore Business Federation.

